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Louis H. Sullivan

American, 1856–1924

Decorative panel, 1884–85

Terra-cotta

Made by Northwestern Terra Cotta Works (Norweta), Chicago, 1884–1956

From the Scoville Building, Chicago (demolished 1974); Adler and Sullivan, architects

Minneapolis Institute of Arts, gift of the Department of Environmental Affairs, U.S. Government 77.23.5

This and two identical panels in the MIA's collection came from the Scoville Building, one of the Adler and Sullivan firm's earliest commissions. The architects had to remodel an existing Adler structure to accord with a new, larger addition. Sullivan's "organic" decoration of stylized plants helped tie the old and new structures together. Panels like this one, with a motif of large palmetto leaves and small flowers, were grouped in threes above the fourth-story windows. A fifth-story window lunette from the Scoville Building, with unfurling fern-frond decoration, is on view in gallery 300.

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Cedar Street elevation, January 15, 1907

Blueprint

For the National Farmers' Bank, Owatonna, Minnesota; Louis Sullivan, architect

Lent by William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis
L2013.58.12

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Louis H. Sullivan

American, 1856–1924

George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Cast of teller's wicket, 1967 (designed 1908)

Bronze

Cast by Jerry Bonnette

Designed for the National Farmers' Bank, Owatonna, Minnesota;
Louis Sullivan, architect

Minneapolis Institute of Arts, gift of Roger G. Kennedy 98.256.17

The original seven teller wickets in the National Farmers' Bank banking room were removed during renovations in 1929 and 1940. So far as is known, none survive. This cast is one of three made by Jerry Bonnette in 1967 from an eighth wicket, given by the manufacturer to the Art Institute of Chicago in 1908. Though at one remove from the original, it clearly shows the skill Elmslie contributed to the bank's elaborate decorative scheme.

The wicket's geometric, rectilinear framework is overlaid with scrolling curves and organic designs of pods, leaves, and berries. The abstracted, highly detailed natural forms are meant to be seen and appreciated at close range. In contrast, a cast iron panel for the Woodbury County Courthouse (also in this exhibition), with simpler, bolder abstraction, was meant to be viewed from a distance.

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Louis H. Sullivan

American, 1856–1924

George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

“Consultation Rooms” sign, c. 1908

Cast iron, pigment

For the National Farmers’ Bank, Owatonna, Minnesota; Louis Sullivan, architect

Minneapolis Institute of Arts, gift of Roger G. Kennedy 98.256.22

The lettering on this sign is in a playful font designed by Elmslie for the Owatonna bank’s signage. The letter T is in the form of a T square, a traditional drafting tool. This particular sign may never have been installed.

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Louis H. Sullivan

American, 1856–1924

George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Window, 1907–8

Glass, lead coming

From the Henry B. Babson house, Riverside, Illinois (demolished 1960); Louis Sullivan, architect

Minneapolis Institute of Arts, The Modernism Collection, gift of Norwest Bank Minnesota 98.276.1

The Babson house was Sullivan's best-known residential commission. Elmslie, who excelled at progressive house design, worked extensively on the Babson project. This window of his design appeared with identical windows in a series on the first and second floors. Elmslie kept to linear geometric patterns and limited the colors to soft purple, translucent white, and green. When Babson wanted to alter his house and add furniture four years later, he entrusted Elmslie and his new partner, Purcell, with the work.



Henry B. Babson house, Riverside, Illinois

Photo: William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis





William Gray Purcell

American, 1880–1965

George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Armchair, 1912

Oak with modern cloth upholstery

From the Henry B. Babson house, Riverside, Illinois (demolished 1960); Louis Sullivan, architect

Minneapolis Institute of Arts, gift of David and Patricia Gebhard
98.235.3

Elmslie had a large hand in the design of the Babson house when working for Sullivan, so Babson retained Purcell and Elmslie when he desired alterations and furniture in 1912. This box chair is one of several pieces of furniture Purcell and Elmslie designed. The quartersawn oak functions as a design element, in the Arts and Crafts manner, and small "B" monograms are carved on each side.



Babson house balcony after remodeling by Purcell and Elmslie

Photo: William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis



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William Gray Purcell

American, 1880–1965

George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Armchair, c. 1911–12

Oak and leather, metal tacks

From the Merchants Bank of Winona, Minnesota; Purcell, Feick and Elmslie, architects

Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Driscoll Arts Accession Fund 93.1

The Merchants Bank of Winona, still in use today, included custom furniture as part of the commission, a rarity among Purcell and Elmslie's banks. At least eight chairs of this design were ordered for the directors' boardroom. Their cubelike shape echoes that of the bank building. The vertical spindle "screens" forming the sides also appear in chairs and the stairwell at the Edna S. Purcell residence (now the Purcell-Cutts house) in Minneapolis, designed at the same time.



Directors' boardroom, Merchants Bank of Winona

Photo: William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Drawing for terra-cotta, main piers, 1911–12

Graphite and colored pencil on kraft paper

For the Merchants Bank of Winona, Minnesota; Purcell, Feick and Elmslie, architects

Lent by William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis
L2013.58.10

Following Elmslie's success in using elaborate terra-cotta ornament at the National Farmers' Bank in Owatonna, Purcell and Elmslie developed a similar scheme for the Merchants Bank of Winona. The façade is lavishly adorned with terra-cotta that has stylized grain motifs glazed tan and green to complement the Roman brick. An eagle below the main entrance lunette symbolizes American business and values.

A distinctive element of the Merchants Bank is its post-and-lintel construction. The building is anchored by a steel frame on the four corners and clad in brick. This drawing shows Elmslie's design for the large and elaborate terra-cotta motifs for the corners. With complex bilaterally symmetrical motifs, Elmslie tended to delineate just half, switching sides in the course of drawing.

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Drawing for terra-cotta cap on exterior brick piers, 1911–12

Graphite on kraft paper, mounted on board

For the Merchants Bank of Winona, Minnesota; Purcell, Feick and Elmslie, architects

Lent by William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis
L2013.58.11

This drawing for terra-cotta to cap the four slender piers on the bank's two street façades includes Elmslie's directions to the sculptor at American Terra Cotta Company, Kristian Schneider. Elmslie specified depth in certain areas and also noted places where Schneider could modify the design, an indication of trust between designer and sculptor. The design was to be more or less identical on the three visible sides of the piers. Of the bank's \$44,052.28 total cost, \$1,980.00 was for the terra-cotta fabrication and installation.

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William Gray Purcell

American, 1880–1965

George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Annotated sketch for chairs, c. 1911–12

Graphite on paper

For the Merchants Bank of Winona, Minnesota; Purcell, Feick and Elmslie, architects

Lent by William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis
L2013.58.8

The extensive notes by Elmslie on this page of Purcell's sketches give some insight into how the two collaborated in their work: "You have to do a little thinking on the chairs. They are not comfortable and must be made so." As the Merchants Bank chair in this gallery attests, the leather upholstery is luxurious; however, the proportions do not seem generous by today's standards.

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Drawing for façade art-glass window group,

c. 1913

Graphite and ink on paper, mounted on card stock

For the Madison State Bank, Madison, Minnesota (demolished 1968); Purcell, Feick and Elmslie, architects

Lent by William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis
L2013.58.1

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Drawing for art-glass skylight, c. 1913

Graphite and ink on paper, mounted on card stock

For the Madison State Bank, Madison, Minnesota (demolished 1968); Purcell, Feick and Elmslie, architects

Lent by William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis
L2013.58.2

The Madison State Bank, though compact, had elaborate art-glass decoration and terra-cotta exterior ornament. Like his designs for terra-cotta, Elmslie's specifications for stained-glass windows consisted largely of partly finished drawings. He had a skilled partner for art glass in E. L. Sharretts of Mosaic Art Shops in Minneapolis. Sharretts produced nearly all the art glass for Purcell and Elmslie projects, and Elmslie knew he would interpret the drawings to beautiful effect in glass.

On the drawing for the Madison Bank glass, Elmslie suggests starting with colors used for the glass at the Merchants Bank of Winona and gives Sharretts leeway in final color choice and motif placement. The skylight for the Madison State Bank is on view in gallery 300. Three replacement panels were produced for the MIA by Monarch Studios, using this drawing as a guide.



Teller booth with skylight, Madison State Bank
Photo: William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis



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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Preliminary elevation, Albert Lea State Bank project, c. 1921

Graphite on paper

Minneapolis Institute of Arts, gift of Roger G. Kennedy 98.256.20

The unbuilt Albert Lea bank was one of Purcell and Elmslie's last projects before the firm's dissolution in 1921. At the bottom of this drawing are notations made by William Purcell at a later date (likely in the 1950s), remarking on Elmslie's design facility.

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Preliminary elevation for Elks Club project, Winona, Minnesota, 1910

Graphite on paper

Minneapolis Institute of Arts, gift of Roger G. Kennedy 98.256.1

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Drawing for “Railing in Chancel,” c. 1915

Ink, graphite, and colored pencil on paper

Minneapolis Institute of Arts, gift of Roger G. Kennedy 98.256.19

Elmslie’s delicate drawing for a church chancel railing consists of four decorative panels set in beveled frames. The design is a dynamic variation on the “flying V” motif, a favorite of Elmslie’s. In the center of each V and along the lower edges are abstracted flowers and podlike forms. The design was probably meant to be executed in sawed wood, and the blue and orange backgrounds may indicate that fabric or fabric-covered wood was to be used as a backing.

Purcell and Elmslie provided designs for several churches. This chancel railing for an unidentified church seems closer to the firm’s projects from the 1910s than to Elmslie’s later solo work such as the Congregational church in Western Springs, Illinois (1928). Part of an organ screen from the Western Springs church can be seen in gallery 300.

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Dining chair, 1910

Oak, simulated leather

From the T. B. Keith house, Eau Claire, Wisconsin (demolished c. 1960); Purcell and Feick, architects

Minneapolis Institute of Arts, gift of T. Gordon and Gladys P. Keith
99.62.9

This chair is part of a dining room suite commissioned by Mrs. T. B. Keith for her 19th-century home in Eau Claire. The elaborate reticulated V back, extending to the bottom stretcher, was a design favored by Elmslie for dining chairs, and he repeated it with variations for other clients—and for himself. Unfortunately, few of the chairs survive. Another chair type, with a more delicate V back, can be seen in the dining suite made for Mrs. Hanna of Chicago, also on view in this gallery.

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

First-floor plan and site plan, c. 1913

Graphite on tracing paper

For the Edna S. Purcell house (now the Purcell-Cutts house),
Minneapolis; Purcell, Feick and Elmslie, architects

Lent by William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural
Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis
L2013.58.5

This is the final plan, showing the Edna S. Purcell house
situated on its 50-by-150-foot city lot on Lake Place, with
hardscape including planters and a reflecting pool, and
landscaping of trees, shrubs, and native plants.



Edna and James Purcell in the front garden of the Edna S. Purcell house, probably
summer 1914

Photo: William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Preliminary plan, March 20, 1913

Graphite on tracing paper

For the Edna S. Purcell house (now the Purcell-Cutts house),
Minneapolis; Purcell, Feick and Elmslie, architects

Lent by William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural
Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis
L2013.58.14

This design shows a “hanging garden” near the dining room’s south windows and a back porch attached to the dining room, neither of which is in the final plan. Elmslie’s drawing from March 26 is closer to the realized plan, with the porch separated from the dining room by a narrow “bridge.”

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Preliminary plan for second floor, March 20, 1913

Graphite on tracing paper

For the Edna S. Purcell house (now the Purcell-Cutts house),
Minneapolis; Purcell, Feick and Elmslie, architects

Lent by William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural
Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis
L2013.58.15

The sleeping porch and maid's "dovecote" room appear in the final plan. What became the east-facing morning room is shown here as a separate bedroom with a balcony. In the final plan, Purcell and Elmslie ingeniously linked the morning room to William and Edna's bedroom with a large folding wood screen.

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Preliminary elevation, "Sketch of front for W.G.P."

March 20, 1913

Graphite and colored pencil on tracing paper, mounted on board

For the Edna S. Purcell house (now the Purcell-Cutts house), Minneapolis; Purcell, Feick and Elmslie, architects

Lent by William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis
L2013.58.16

Very few color renderings of perspectives and elevations by the Purcell and Elmslie firm survive, and it is unlikely that Elmslie completed many. However, this delightful elevation, which accompanied the March 20 plan (also on view here), would have helped Purcell visualize the window-wall placement and sawed-wood decoration that Elmslie was developing for the house. Since Elmslie was working from Chicago at this time, he and Purcell mailed many of their plans, sketches, and notes to each other.

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Preliminary plan, March 26, 1913

Graphite on tracing paper

For the Edna S. Purcell house (now the Purcell-Cutts house),
Minneapolis; Purcell, Feick and Elmslie, architects

Lent by William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural
Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis
L2013.58.13

Here the sunken living room is shown connected to the dining room above by a central stair, a solution Purcell and Elmslie ultimately abandoned in favor of a north stair near the front entry. A facetious element is Elmslie's notation that the cross in the plan indicates a sculpture of the firm's other partner, George Feick.

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Five drawings for art glass, 1913

Graphite on kraft paper

For the Edna S. Purcell house (now the Purcell-Cutts house),
Minneapolis; Purcell, Feick and Elmslie, architects

Lent by William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural
Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis
L2013.58.3

These five drawings indicating the sizes and designs of window and interior glass needed for Purcell's house include an unrealized design at top center and also the playful "Peek a Boo" side light for the front door. The dominant diamond shapes can be read as abstracted wheat sheaves or possibly box kites. For the more than eighty art-glass panels in the house, E. L. Sharretts's Mosaic Art Shops in Minneapolis charged no more than five hundred dollars.



"Peek a Boo" window detail



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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Scale drawing for sawed-wood decoration “Gray Days and Gold,” c. 1913

Graphite and colored pencil on tissue paper

For the Edna S. Purcell house (now the Purcell-Cutts house),
Minneapolis; Purcell, Feick and Elmslie, architects

Lent by William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural
Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis
L2013.58.6

One of the two “Gray Days and Gold” fretwork panels for the outside of the house is shown above. This drawing may be the work of Marion Alice Parker, a skilled drafts-person at the firm, who sometimes prepared full-scale drawings based on Elmslie’s initial designs.

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Fretwork panel, 1913

Cypress wood, stain

From the Edna S. Purcell house (now the Purcell-Cutts house),
Minneapolis; Purcell, Feick and Elmslie, architects

Minneapolis Institute of Arts, bequest of Anson Cutts 2005.122.2

The subtle exterior decoration of the Purcell-Cutts house includes a stenciled frieze below the roofline and two sawed-wood panels at the entrance. This cypress panel and its identical mate adorned the projecting beam-end near the front door. In 2005, to preserve them from the elements, they were removed to the MIA. The reproductions now installed at the house were painstakingly made—by means of laser technology instead of a fretsaw—following Elmslie’s original design (also shown here).

The vine-and-leaf motifs are a foil for the strongly geometric exterior of the house. The motto “Gray Days and Gold,” in the lower right corner, has been variously interpreted as referring to Purcell’s beloved grandparents William and Catherine Gray, to the colors of the firm’s progressive architecture, and to funds provided by Purcell’s father in support of the architectural practice and construction of the house.



“Gray Days and Gold” beam-end design

Photo: Christian Korab



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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Elevation and detail, "Lamp for the Little Joker,"

c. 1913

Graphite on paper

For the Edna S. Purcell house (now the Purcell-Cutts house),
Minneapolis; Purcell, Feick and Elmslie, architects

Lent by William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural
Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis
L2013.58.17

This drawing for the floor lamp, with specifications for a vellum shade, art-glass accents, and "broidered scarfs," shows a layered elegance, with textiles contributing to the effect. As photographed around 1915, the lamp has trailing plants, not embroidered fabrics, as decorative accents.



East end of the living room, c. 1915

Photo: William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Design for sawed-wood decoration for fireplace, c. 1914

Graphite and colored pencil on tracing paper

For the Edna S. Purcell house (now the Purcell-Cutts house),
Minneapolis; Purcell, Feick and Elmslie, architects

Lent by William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural
Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis
L2013.58.18

Elmslie's notes indicate how these ornamental bands of wood should function in conjunction with the mural painted by Charles Livingston Bull in November 1914: "The idea is playing over the picture in a delicate manner. Just a closing with a few violin string notes of recall." He also suggested two to three background colors behind the sawed wood "to make it interesting."



Living room, showing mural
Photo: Christian Korab



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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Preliminary sketches for “Surprise Point” chair, c. 1913

Graphite and colored pencil on tracing paper

For the Edna S. Purcell house (now the Purcell-Cutts house),
Minneapolis; Purcell, Feick and Elmslie, architects

Lent by William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural
Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis
L2013.58.19

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

“Surprise Point” chair, c. 1913

Mahogany, modern cloth upholstery

Manufactured by G. F. Weber Studios, Minneapolis, 1911–94

From the Edna S. Purcell house (now the Purcell-Cutts house),
Minneapolis; Purcell, Feick and Elmslie, architects

Lent by William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural
Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis
L90.148.1

The “Surprise Point” occasional chair, a custom design for Purcell’s home, was named for the shape of its back, described by Purcell as “perhaps not ‘exclamation points,’ but ‘surprise points’ in the room.” This accords with the architects’ sense of humor regarding the house, which they called “The Little Joker.” The chair’s delicate design anticipates the dining room suite made two years later for Mrs. Hanna of Chicago, which is exhibited here. Elmslie’s preliminary sketch for the chair is on view nearby.

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Fabric screen, c. 1913

Wool, pigment

From the Edna S. Purcell house (now the Purcell-Cutts house),
Minneapolis; Purcell, Feick and Elmslie, architects

Minneapolis Institute of Arts, bequest of Anson Cutts

This is one of two stenciled fabric screens that were likely used to diffuse light through the back porch doors of the Purcell-Cutts house. The stencil pattern is similar to that on the walls in the guest bedroom of the house.

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Sideboard and two chairs, 1915

Mahogany, wood inlays, iridescent glass, leaded glass,
replacement silver-plated metal rods, modern upholstery

Manufactured by John S. Bradstreet and Company, Minneapolis,
c. 1899–1932

For Mrs. William H. Hanna, Chicago

Minneapolis Institute of Arts, The Walter C. and Mary C. Briggs
Trust Fund 2011.3.1,5,6

Recent conservation and reupholstery of the Hanna
suite was made possible by generous contributions from
Linda Ahlers, Darlene Carroll, Theresa Carufel, Ann Davis,
Beverly Fiman, Carrie Herrera, Julie Kollitz, Sally Lehmann,
Mary Lou Marsh, Patricia McCullough, Jennifer Komar
Olivarez, Barb Pinto, Hope Thornberg, and Victoria Veach.



Dining room of the Edna S. Purcell house with Hanna furniture suite, 1915

Photo: William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Table and two chairs, 1915

Mahogany, wood inlays, iridescent glass, leaded glass, replacement silver-plated metal rods, modern upholstery

Manufactured by John S. Bradstreet and Company, Minneapolis, c. 1899–1932

For Mrs. William H. Hanna, Chicago

Minneapolis Institute of Arts, The Walter C. and Mary C. Briggs Trust Fund 2011.3.2–4

For this one-of-a-kind dining room suite, Elmslie used dynamic triangular and trapezoidal forms and a wealth of ornament, applying Sullivan's concept of systemically developed organic decoration. The lustrous, reddish-toned mahogany—a wood rare in Prairie School furniture—is complemented by multicolored inlay around the top edges of the table and sideboard, art-glass inlay in the top rail of each chair, and silver-plated metal rods in the legs of the table and sideboard. Each end of the table conceals "lopers"—extenders that can be pulled out to support leaves, thus keeping the square tabletop intact.

Purcell called the Hanna furniture the firm's "most highly jeweled set." He was so fond of it that before it was shipped to Mrs. Hanna he moved it into his own house for a photo shoot for the journal *Western Architect*. It looked more appropriate, he thought, than his own dining room suite, which he had designed in 1908 for his grandmother's house.

The MIA borrowed the Hanna table, sideboard, and two chairs in 1992 for display and to replicate them for the Purcell-Cutts house. In 2011, the museum acquired the suite, along with two more original chairs. Thanks to donations from a group of generous MIA members, the chairs were recently conserved and reupholstered in a period-appropriate fabric.

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George Grant Elmslie, designer

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Sample cast for elevator-bank decoration, c. 1916

Cast iron

Manufactured by Crown Iron Works, St. Anthony, Minnesota, 1878–present

For the Woodbury County Courthouse, Sioux City, Iowa; William L. Steele, Sr., architect, Purcell and Elmslie, associate architects

Minneapolis Institute of Arts, gift of David and Patricia Gebhard 2002.211

Recent research in the William Gray Purcell Papers at the Northwest Architectural Archives has identified this object as a sample cast of metal ornament for the elevators of the Woodbury County Courthouse. A series of eleven such designs stretches across the top of the second-level elevator bank at the back, facing the rotunda—a rare use of metal amid the sea of terra-cotta decoration.

Elmslie intended this ornament to complement the surrounding terra-cotta designs, four drawings for which are on view here. Its organic motifs, which include seedpods and “lettuce leaf” decoration, show Elmslie’s adherence to Louis Sullivan’s ideals, yet the organic curves and spirals are balanced by the geometry of parallel horizontal lines in the center. The relative simplicity of this design in contrast to the minutely detailed teller’s wicket cast for the National Farmers’ Bank of Owatonna (also exhibited here) was dictated by its position in the courthouse rotunda, where it was meant to be viewed from a distance.



Mezzanine level of courthouse showing elevator-bank grille

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George Grant Elmslie, designer

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Sample cast for elevator grille roundel, c. 1916

Bronze

Manufactured by Crown Iron Works, St. Anthony, Minnesota,
1878–present

For the Woodbury County Courthouse, Sioux City, Iowa; William L.
Steele, Sr., architect, Purcell and Elmslie, associate architects

Lent by Cliff and Nancy Anderson L2013.54

The central elevator entries on the first and second floors of the courthouse have three-panel sliding doors featuring this cast bronze emblem on each panel. At the top, on a “stem” rising from beneath the circular rim, is a W (for Woodbury) flanked by Sullivan’s “lettuce leaves.” Curvilinear motifs suggesting lily pads, buds, and seed-pods are counterbalanced by delicate horizontal lines. The roundel format is unusual in Elmslie’s work.

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Drawing for terra-cotta capital in rotunda, “Bottom of Terra Cotta,” c. 1916

Graphite on tissue paper

For the Woodbury County Courthouse, Sioux City, Iowa; William L. Steele, Sr., architect, Purcell and Elmslie, associate architects

Lent by William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis
L2013.58.9

Elmslie created dozens of designs for the terra-cotta that adorns the courthouse. This drawing for column capitals in the extravagantly decorated rotunda repeats motifs used in the building’s exterior metalwork.

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Drawing for terra-cotta, "Capital for Court Room,"

c. 1916

Graphite and colored pencil on paper

For the Woodbury County Courthouse, Sioux City, Iowa; William L. Steele, Sr., architect, Purcell and Elmslie, associate architects

Lent by William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis
L2013.58.21

In a Prairie School play on classical Roman architecture, Elmslie substituted "lettuce leaf" motifs and swirls for the acanthus leaves and scrolls of the Composite order.

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Drawing for terra-cotta, "Soffit of G.A.R. [Grand Armory Room] Overhang," c. 1916

Graphite and colored pencil on paper

For the Woodbury County Courthouse, Sioux City, Iowa; William L. Steele, Sr., architect, Purcell and Elmslie, associate architects

Lent by William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis
L2013.58.20

This design for an overhang outside the Grand Armory Room on the top floor of the courthouse echoes the motif on the back of the second-floor elevator bank, a sample cast of which is on view above.

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Drawing for terra-cotta, “Sill Terminals,”

February, 1916

Graphite on stationery paper

For the Woodbury County Courthouse, Sioux City, Iowa; William L. Steele, Sr., architect, Purcell and Elmslie, associate architects

Lent by William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis
L2013.58.22

The “Sill Terminals” were large terra-cotta ornaments at either end of a group of windows on the south façade of the courthouse. Elmslie used a similar square motif on the Merchants Bank of Winona; a drawing for that ornament is also in this gallery.

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Photograph of upper terra-cotta ornament for rotunda column, c. 1916

Photo mounted on board

For the Woodbury County Courthouse, Sioux City, Iowa; William L. Steele, Sr., architect, Purcell and Elmslie, associate architects

Lent by William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis
L2013.58.7

The columns on the mezzanine level of the rotunda exhibit the most exuberant use of terra-cotta decoration within the courthouse. On the actual columns, the swirling foliate section near the lower center of the photo projects over the rectangular element beneath, resulting in a three-dimensional sculptural form that recalls the massive electroliers at the National Farmers' Bank in Owatonna (also drawn largely by Elmslie). Photographs of models were sent to the architects for approval before molds for casting the terra-cotta were made. After casting, the ornaments were fired and glazed.

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Lantern, c. 1924

Leaded glass, metal, electrical components, wood

From the First National Bank of Adams, Adams, Minnesota;
Purcell and Elmslie, architects

Minneapolis Institute of Arts, gift of Roger G. Kennedy
98.256.7.1a,b

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Four preliminary façade sketches, c. 1922

Graphite and colored pencil on tracing paper

For the First National Bank of Adams, Adams, Minnesota; Purcell and Elmslie, architects

Lent by William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis
L2013.58.23.1-4

The Adams bank was begun in 1920 as a Purcell and Elmslie project but completed in 1924 by Elmslie after the firm's dissolution. These sketches show Elmslie's almost playful exploration of the exterior massing and window elements. The finished structure was a pleasantly proportioned "jewel box" with decorative window walls over the main entrance and along the side of the building and terra-cotta crowning the cornice.

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

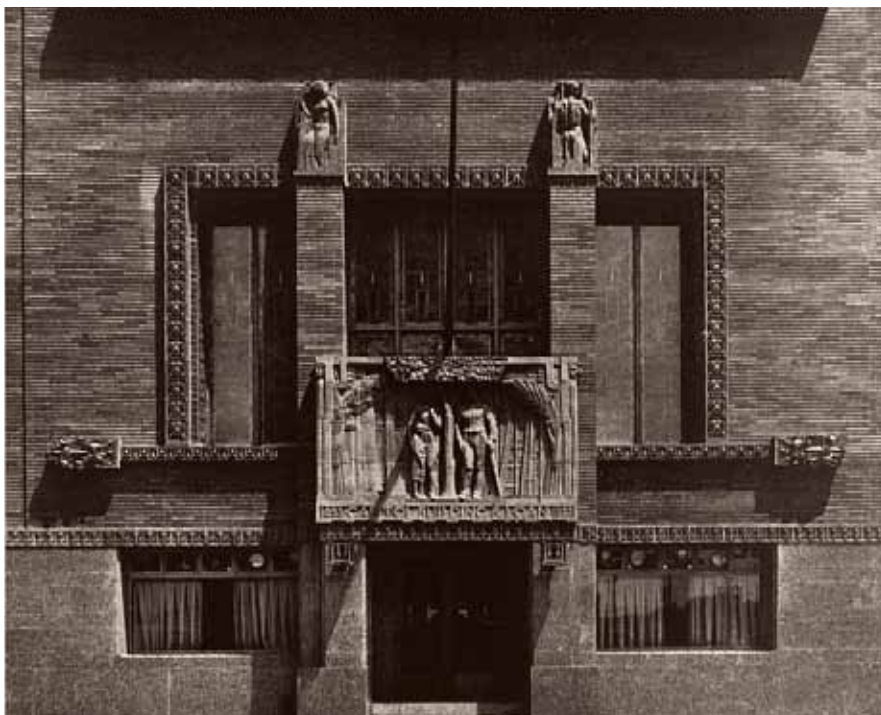
Two windows, c. 1922–24

Leaded glass

Capitol Building and Loan Association Building, Topeka, Kansas (demolished 1967); George Grant Elmslie, architect

Minneapolis Institute of Arts, gift of Roger G. Kennedy 98.256.5.7 and 98.256.6.2

Elmslie began the Topeka building for the Purcell and Elmslie firm but completed it as a solo project in 1924. What started out as a compact structure grew to the size of a small skyscraper when the client decided to add more floors. The end gable design references the “bank home” theme Elmslie explored during this period. In these windows for the first-floor entrance areas, he repeated geometric forms and colors to unify the interior and exterior.



Capitol Building and Loan Association, front entry, c. 1922

Photo: William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis



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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Main building cornice panel, 1936

Terra-cotta

Manufactured by Midland Terra Cotta Company, Chicago, 1910–39; Fritz Albert (American, 1865–1940), modeler

From the Oliver P. Morton School, Hammond, Indiana (demolished 1991); William S. Hutton, architect, and George Grant Elmslie, designer

Minneapolis Institute of Arts, gift of Cathers and Dembrosky 2006.72

In the 1930s, Elmslie collaborated with the architect William S. Hutton on three public elementary schools in Hammond, Indiana: the Oliver P. Morton School, the Thomas A. Edison School, and Washington Irving School. All three received funding from the Public Works Administration, part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933.

The Morton school and the concurrently designed and built Edison school impressively combined Prairie School rectilinearity with Elmslie's organic ornamentation and large-scale figural sculpture. This panel—one of a series crowning the cornice of the Morton school—features the dynamic "flying V" Elmslie favored, along with abstracted floral and foliate ornament. Elmslie's sketch for the design is also shown here. Originally the terra-cotta sculptor Kristian Schneider, who had worked with both Louis Sullivan and Elmslie since the 1880s, was to make the models from Elmslie's drawings. After Schneider's death, however, the sculptor Fritz Albert took over the terra-cotta modeling project for Midland Terra Cotta Company.

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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Drawings for terra-cotta, “Upper Cornice and Band Under” and “Lower Cornice and Band,”

c. 1936

Graphite on tracing paper, mounted on kraft paper

For the Thomas A. Edison School, Hammond, Indiana (demolished 1991); William S. Hutton, architect, and George Grant Elmslie, designer

Lent by William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis
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George Grant Elmslie

American (born Scotland), 1869–1952

Drawing for terra-cotta, "Upper Cornice and Band Under," c. 1936

Graphite on tracing paper, mounted on kraft paper

For the Oliver P. Morton School, Hammond, Indiana (demolished 1991); William S. Hutton, architect, and George Grant Elmslie, designer

Lent by William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis
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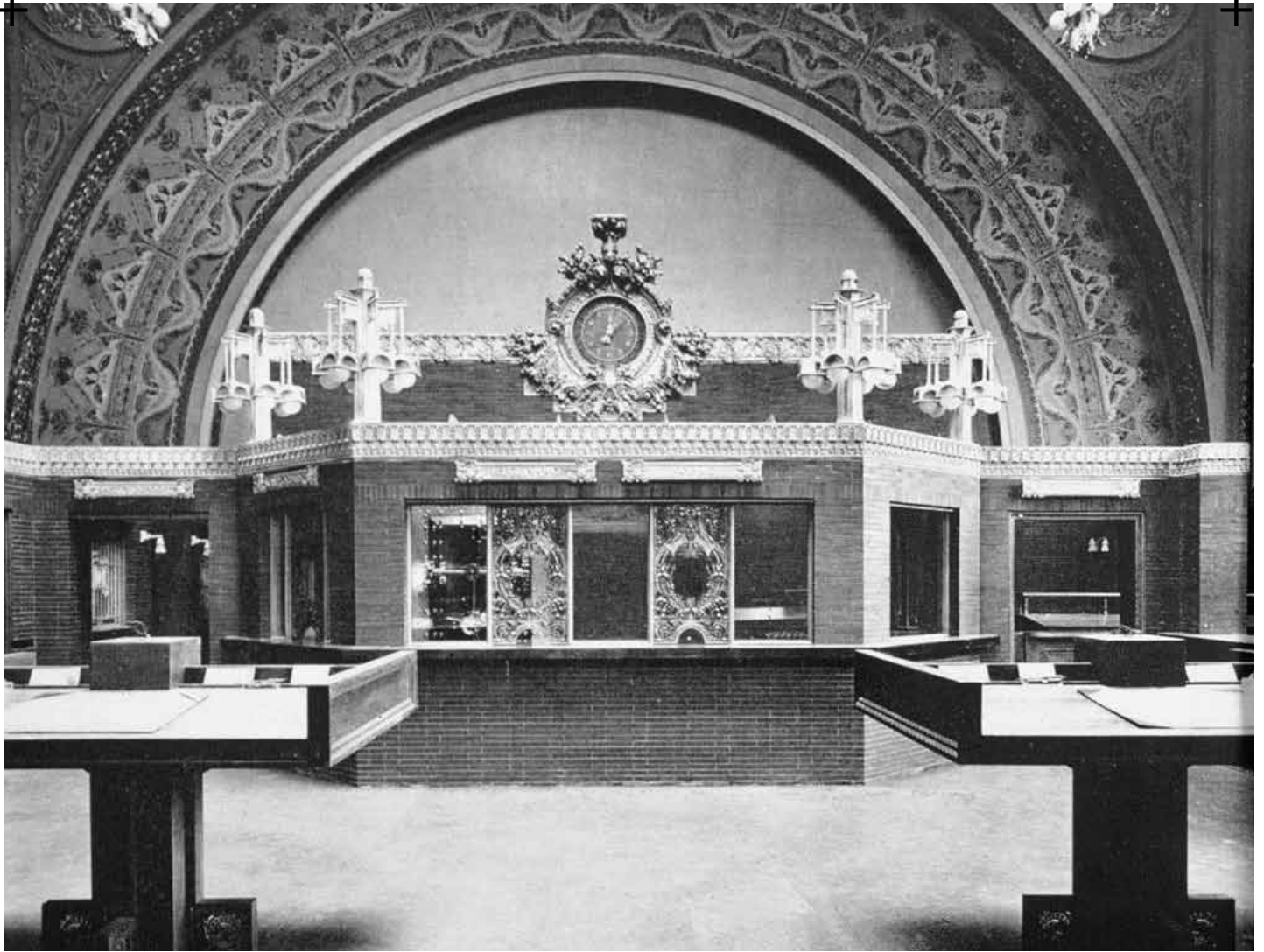
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Scoville Building, Chicago

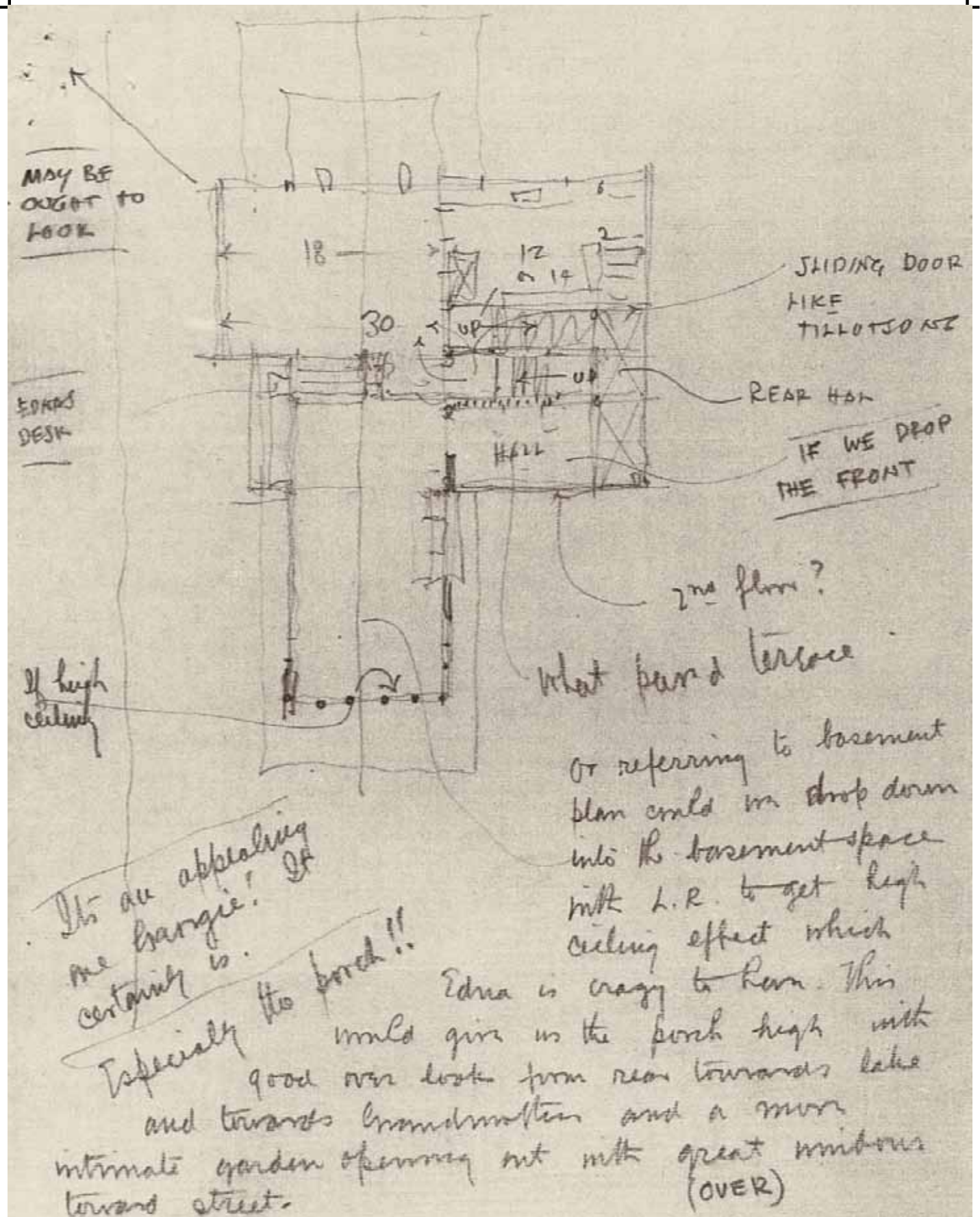
Photo: Historic American Buildings Survey, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division





Teller wickets in the National Farmers' Bank, c. 1909

Photo: Henry Fuermann

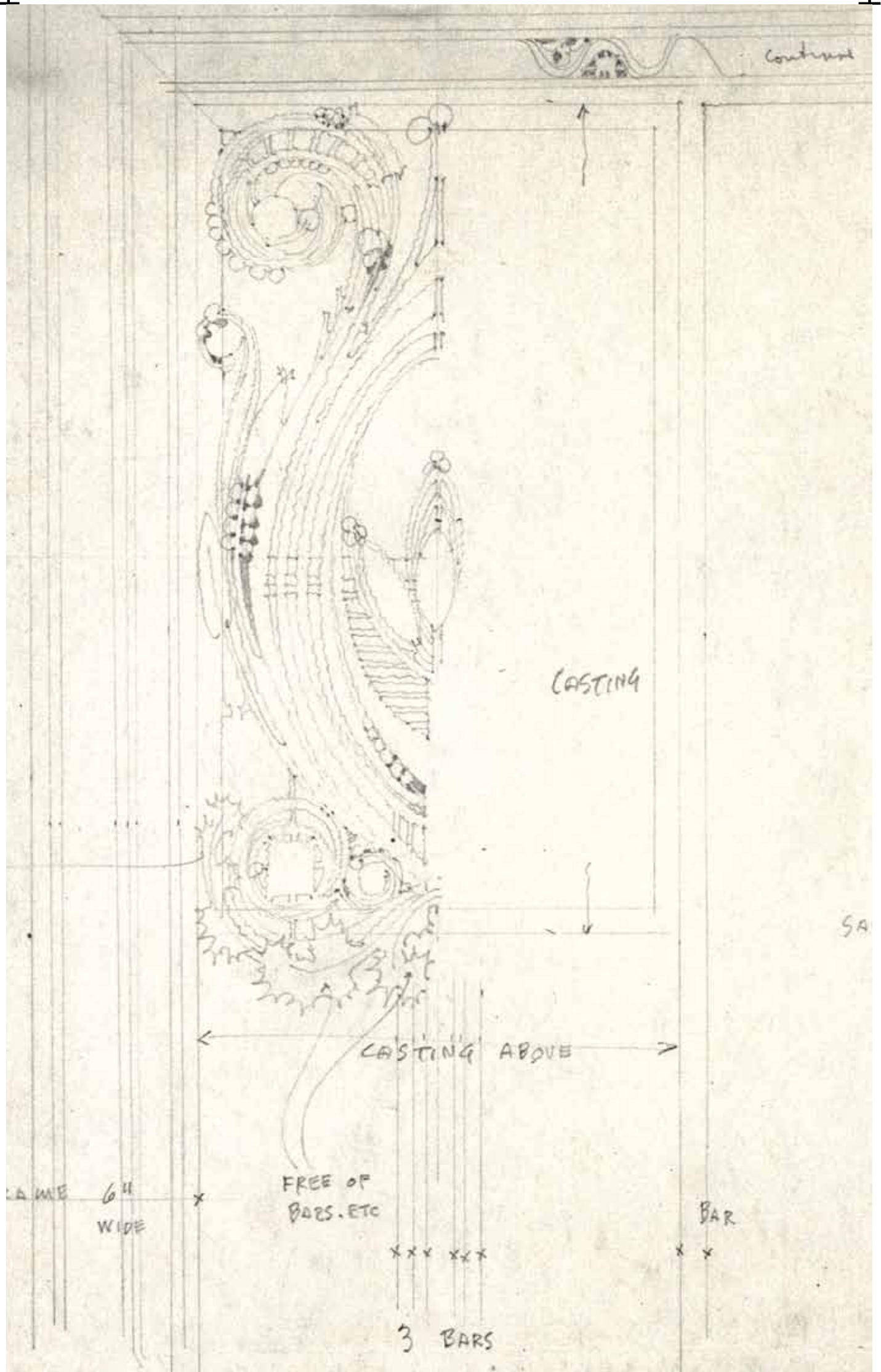


Purcell's sketch for a plan of the Edna S. Purcell house with his notes to Elmslie, early 1913

Photo: William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis



"Peek a Boo" window detail



George Grant Elmslie, drawing for elevator-bank decoration, c. 1915

Photo: David Gebhard



Woodbury County Courthouse, mezzanine with terra-cotta decoration, c. 1921

Photo: William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis, Minnesota



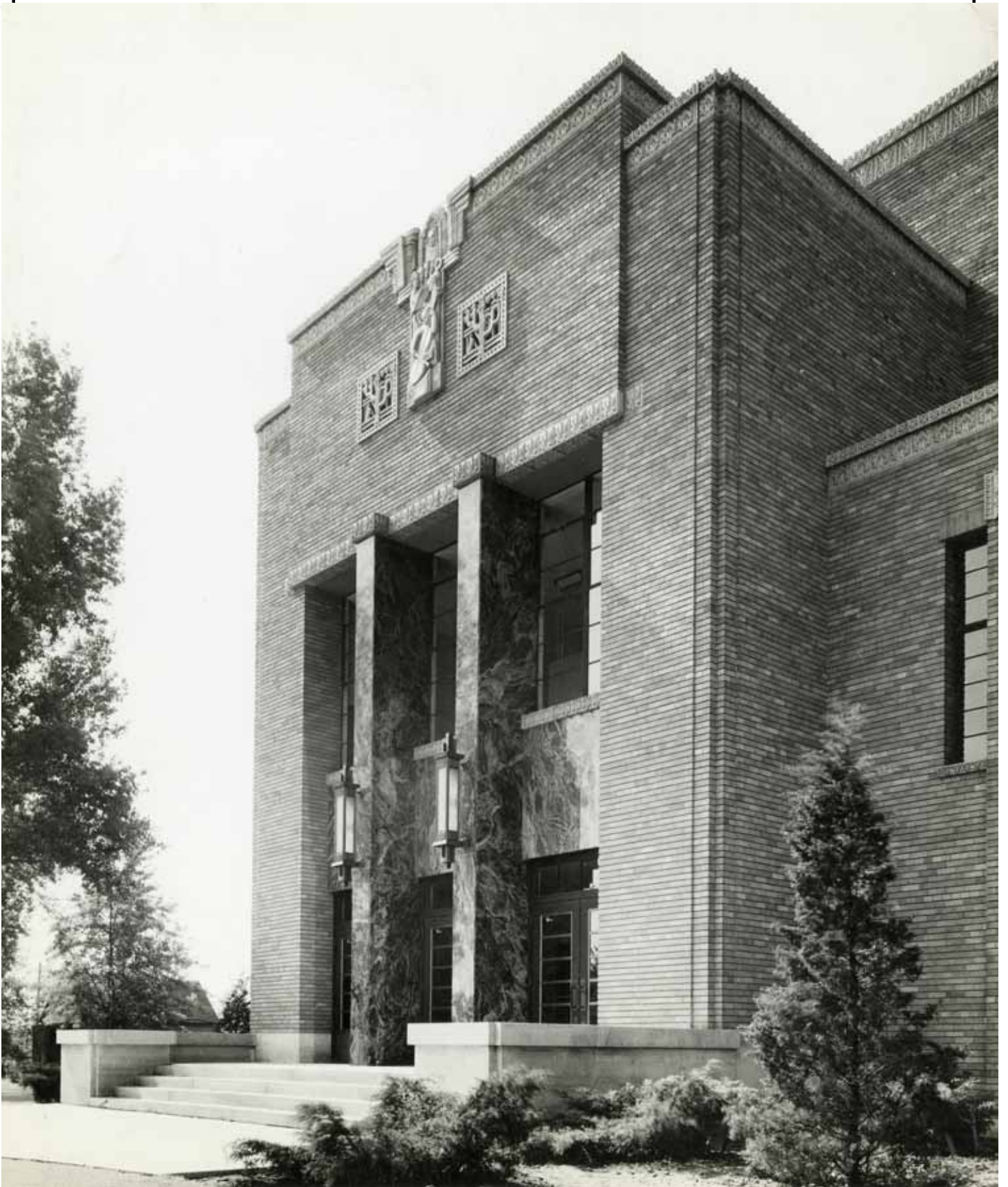
Woodbury County Courthouse atrium, c. 1921

Photo: William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis, Minnesota



First National Bank of Adams, c. 1924

Photo: William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis



Oliver P. Morton School, Hammond, Indiana

Photo: William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis

